

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

OMB-01 IO-10 /073 W

----- 105609

R 201300Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2341

S E C R E T NEW DELHI 15479

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, IN

SUBJECT: UPSURGE IN CRITICISM AIMED AT US IN INDIA

REF: A) DELHI 15355V

B) DELHI 15353

C) DELHI 15308

1. THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT UPTURN IN CRITICISM AIMED AT THE US EITHER EXPLICITLY OR IMPLICITLY BY INDIANS FROM MRS. GANDHI AND HER MINISTERS TO STAGE CONGRESS PARTY LEADERS AND THE GENERAL PRESS. THE REFTELS DESCRIBE SOME OF IT BUT MUCH WE HAVE NOT REPORTED. SOME COMES FROM CLEARLY IDENTIFI-
ABLE COMMUNISTS LIKE MINISTER OF STATE FOR PETROLEUM AND CHEMI-
CALS K.R. GANESH WHO IS A VIRTUALLY UNQUENCHABLE CRITIC BUT WHO WAS SILENCED--WE MUST ASSUME AT HIGH-LEVEL INSTANCE--FROM
EARLY OCTOBER UNTIL THE LAST WEEK. SOME STEMS FROM STATE
OFFICIALS LIKE MADHYA PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER SETHI WHO JUMPS ON
WHATEVER BANDWAGON HE SENSES THE PM MAY BE PULLING AT ANY
PARTICULAR MOMENT AND WHO HAS LEAPED ONTO THE "FOREIGN
INTERFERENCE" GOCART IN THE LAST FEW DAYS. BLITZ, OUR
TRADITIONAL BOMBAY WEEKLY BETE NOIR, AFTER BEING
TOLD TO STOP BEATING THE US BY THE GOI ABOUT A MONTH AGO,
UNLEASHED ITSELF LAST WEEK WITH SEVEN PAGES OF ATTACK ON
US RESPONSIBILITY FOR EVERYTHING BAD THAT HAS HAPPENED IN
BANGLADESH SINCE AUGUST. ALLOF THIS ALMOST CERTAINLY

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FOLLOWS THE PM'S LEAD IN ATTACKING FOREIGN CRITICISM

OF THE INDIAN EMERGENCY AND THE PLIGHT OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY, IN HINTING AT DIRECT ANALOGIES BETWEEN WHAT HAPPENED IN BANGLADESH AND WHAT COULD HAPPEN IN INDIA, AND IN REVIVING AGAIN THE THEME OF FOREIGN ACTIVITY IN INDIA IN SUPPORT OF THE DOMESTIC OPPOSITION.

2. WE HAVE NO DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING SOME ELEMENTS IN A REVIVAL OF POLITICAL CRITICISM OF THE US. THE CPI DOES IT INSTINCTIVELY AND WITH GLEE, AND PARTICULARLY NOW IS ANXIOUS TO DO ANYTHING TO INJURE INDO-US RELATIONS WHICH HAD APPEARED TO BE WAXING SOMEWHAT FRUITFUL SINCE THE SUMMER. FOR THE RANK AND FILE INDIAN POLITICIAN AND JOURNALIST, TROUBLE IN BANGLADESH AND DOMESTIC PROBLEMS ALMOST EQUALLY INSTINCTIVELY ELICIT THE SUSPICION THAT SOME FOREIGN AGENCY IS RESPONSIBLE. BUT WHAT IS BEHIND MRS. GANDHI'S ANNOYANCE AND HER AT LEAST TACIT ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE SHIFT IN POLITICAL AND PRESS CRITICISM?

3. WE OFFER FOUR HYPOTHESES, NOT MUTUALLY INCOMPATIBLE:

(A) BANGLADESH: MRS. GANDHI MAY HAVE LINGERING SUSPICIONS THAT THERE IS GREATER US/PAK INVOLVEMENT IN THE EVENTS IN BANGLADESH THAN MAY AT THE PRESENT TIME BE DEMONSTRABLE. SHE MAY ALSO BE PREPARING A PUBLIC BACK-GROUND FOR LINKING THE CURRENT BANGLADESH MILITARY LEADERSHIP WITH ALLEGED FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN THE SUB-CONTINENT AND WITH THOSE WHO WORKED AGAINST MUJIB IN 1971, AND FOR A DEFENSE OF SOME INDIAN INTERVENTIONIST MOVES IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. THIS IS OUR MOST DISTURBING HYPOTHESIS AND ONE WHICH WE EMPHASIZE IS NOT CLEARLY PROVABLE AT THIS TIME, BUT WHICH COULD BECOME TRUE.

(B) DOMESTIC: MRS. GANDHI IS LEARY OF EITHER RELAXING OR ENDING THE EMERGENCY, OR OF HOLDING ELECTIONS. THE RE-EMPHASIS UPON DOMESTIC ENEMIES, THEIR SUPPOSED INVOLVEMENT WITH FOREIGN AGENCIES AND INFLUENCE, AND THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE, STABILITY, AND UNITY REVIVES A MAJOR THEME USED TO JUSTIFY THE EMERGENCY IN ITS EARLY DAYS AND CONCEIVABLY TO RATIONALIZE ITS CONTINUATION. THERE HAS AS WELL BEEN A SLACKENING OF THE ENTHUSIASM AND RESPONSE

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WHICH MARKED THE FIRST MONTHS AFTER THE EMERGENCY. MRS. GANDHI AND HER TEAM ARE ATTEMPTING TO BOOST THIS AGAIN BUT SOME NEW JOLT MAY BE NECESSARY. THE OLD THEME OF THE OUTSIDE ENEMY MAY AGAIN PROVE USEFUL IN JUSTIFYING SOME NEW "JOLT" TO THE INDIAN SYSTEM IN THE WEEKS AHEAD--INCLUDING MOVES AGAINST THE JUDICIARY OR TO FUNDAMENTALLY TRANSFORM THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION.

(C) ALMOST DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSITE TO THE HYPOTHESIS DESCRIBED IN (B) ABOVE, MRS. GANDHI COULD BE PLANNING TO GRADUALLY RELEASE MORE POLITICAL PRISONERS AND RELAX THE EMERGENCY, AND TOPAVE THE WAY FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS. AS A PREPARATORY MOVE TO THIS, SHE MAY BE REENFORCING THE POLITICAL THEME THAT THE OPPOSITION IS LINKED INSOME WAY WITH "FOREIGN INFLUENCES", BOTH AS A THREAT TO POLITICIANS NOT TO BECOME TOO TROUBLESOME IN THEIR CRITICISMS, AS A PRE-ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN THEME TO UNDERCUT THE CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION OF OPPOSITION POLITICIANS, AND AS A CAUTIONARY MEASURE TO JUSTIFY REARRESTING OPPOSITION LEADERS IN THE FUTURE.

(D) BILATERAL: WE HAVE HEARD FROM SOME SOURCES WITH GOOD CONTACTS IN HIGH GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CIRCLES THAT THERE HAS BEEN "DISAPPOINTMENT" IN THESE HIGH CIRCLES WITH THE ACHIEVEMENTS THUS FAR FROM INDIAN "DETENTE" WITH THE US. OUR SOURCES EXPRESS PUZZLEMENT OVER WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED, BUT URGE THAT THIS DISAPPOINTMENT OVER PERSISTING INSUBSTANTIALITY IN CONCRETE INDO-US RELATIONS EXISTS. CONCEIVABLY THIS, COMBINED WITH A CONTINUING FEELING ON MRS. ANDHI'S PART THAT THE US IS SNIPING AT HER DOMESTIC POLICIES (AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN'S SPEECHES, US REFERENCES TO EVALUATING BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH UN MEMBERS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR VOTES ON THE ZIONISM AND KOREAN ISSUES IN THE UNGA), MAY HAVE LED THE PM TO CONCLUDE THAT WHATEVER BENEFITS MAY HAVE BEEN EXPECTED FROM COURTING THE US (WHICH REQUIRED A RESTRAINT IN CRITICISM OF THE US) ARE NOT WORTH THE EFFORT IN CONTRAST TO THE POTENTIAL USEFULNESS OF THE "FOREIGN ENEMY" THEME FOR DOMESTIC AND OTHER PURPOSES.

4. THE AMBASSADOR IS TAKING UP THE ISSUE OF RENEWED INDIAN CRITICISM OF THE US WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S

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SECRETARY; WE WILL REPORT THAT CONVERSATION SEPARATELY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, CENSORSHIP, ANTIAMERICAN FEELING
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 NOV 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975NEWDE15479
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750405-0943
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751125/aaaaavna.tel
Line Count: 156
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 NEW DELHI 15355, 75 NEW DELHI 15353, 75 NEW DELHI 15308
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 AUG 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <26 NOV 2003 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UPSURGE IN CRITICISM AIMED AT US IN INDIA
TAGS: PINT, SOPN, IN, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006